**Time Period/ Overview**

- originated in the north east of modern-day India and eventually spread across India and into Pakistan (the Indus Valley).

-arose out of the power vacuum created by weak governments after Alexander the Great left the area.

-know as most powerful empire in ancient India, and reigned from 321- 185 BCE, the reigns of 8 emperors.

-founded by Chandragupta Maurya.

**Geography**

-Fairly well protected, like the Nile Valley, by the Himalayas to the north, the Hindu Kush to the northwest, the Thar Desert to the west, and the Chin and Kachin Hills to the north east*.\*

-The fact that the Indus River flows mostly from north to south and the Ganges flows west to east means that the tributes of these rivers nearly intersect, creating a passageway for transport.

-The diversified climate allowed the Empire to grow a larger variety of crops, enabling it to be more self-sufficient, allowing it to dictate trade with other regions, because it was not dependant on their supplies.

- Tropical monsoon in south, temperate in north.

-droughts, flash floods, severe thunderstorms are all common

**Government**

The Mauryan government was highly centralized. It had a very large staff that dealt with tax collection, trade and commerce, vital statistics, welfare of foreigners, and maintaining public places such as markets and temples. There was a strong army that consisted of chariots, infantry, cavalry, and elephants; there was also a well-developed espionage system. The empire was divided into provinces, and the provinces were than divided into districts. The provinces were ruled by a centrally appointed governor, who then appointed a chief magistrate of each district. Most people lived in villages, which were governed by a council of elders.

-Chandragupta began the Mauryan Empire. Little is known about his rise to the status of emperor, though. He united northern India into one powerful, centralized state. Under Chandragupta’s reign, the state regulated trade, levied taxes, and standardized weights and measures. Trade and commerce also flourished during this time. The state also was responsible for providing irrigational facilities, sanitation, and famine relief to its masses.

-Asoka is the grandson on Chandragupta. He is the most famous Mauryan king because the Mauryan Empire peaked under his rule. Asoka felt remorse for his bloody conquest of Kalinga, and therefore converted to Buddhism. For the rest of his reign, Asoka promoted Dharma. According to Indian religions, people who followed the principles of dharma proceeded more quickly to nirvana. Asoka defined the key elements of dharma as nonviolence, tolerance of all sects and opinions, obedience to parents, respect for the Brahmans and other religious teachers and priests, liberality towards friends, humane treatment of servants, and generosity towards all. He also increased infrastructure for the state, with universities, water transit and irrigation systems, hospitals, and major roads. After Asoka died in 232 BCE, the Mauryan Empire started to decline because of progressively weaker kings, and also because of the difficulty of keeping such a vast empire unified.

**Literary Works**

The most important author of the Maruyan Empire was Kautilya, who was Chandragupta’s advisor. He studied at Taxila, which is an early university. It is gererally believed that he wrote the book, Arthasastra, which is loosely translated to ‘science of politics’. The book is mostly known for its contents on political views, but it also deals with economics, mining and metals, agriculture, medicine, wildlife, issues of welfare and the collective ethics that hold a society together. Arthasastra is sometimes compared to Machiavelli’s political treatise *Prince,* because of its ruthless approach to practical politics.

**Architecture**

Under Asoka’s rule, he constructed many monuments that paid tribute to Buddhism. One type of these monuments are the pillars that are found throughout nothern India. The pillars had inscriptions on that focus on Asoka’s belief in Buddhism, and also moral precepts such as right behaviour, benevolence, kindness to prisoners, and respect to animal life. Another monument Asoka built was the Lion Capital. It was originally on the Asoka pillar at Sarnath. The Asoka chakra at the base is now on the Indian flag. Asoka also ordered the creation of 84 000 stupas, which are places of devotion for Buddhism. The most famous stupa is the one at Sanchi. The Barabar caves were also built under Asoka’s reign. These were used to house monks and also hold religious ceremonies.

**Religion-Jainism**

-Religion had a very strong influence on the Mauryan Empire. Although it was in power for less than 150 years, three major religious transformations took place. The fact that the predominate religion changed every few generations facilitated the government’s strong influence. However, there were never any significant civil unrest due to the government influence and changing of beliefs because the three religions that were predominate had many of the same core beliefs as Hinduism, the common religion before and after the Mauryan Empire.

-the consistent exposure to new ideals and ideas made the Mauryan Empire change and progress in many area, including economics

-Shortly after Chandragupta Maurya became emperor he looked for a way to radically change the government in the face of commoners. He instilled Jainism as the religion of the imperial court.

-Jainism promotes non-violence to all living beings and self exploration in the aim of conquering inner daemons, to make one ’s self acceptable for the state of supreme being, with the gods *(not surprising that it was is a descendent of Hinduism)*.

-Late in life, Chandragupta renounced his throne and material possessions to join a wandering group of Jain monks. He died after performing the Jain act of santhara, fasting until death.

-Samrat Samprati, the fifth emperor was also influenced by Jainism; he is known to have built 125,000 Jain Temples across India. Also, he sent Jain preachers to Greece, Persia & middle-east, spreading Jainism.

**Buddhism**

-Asoka the Great was the emperor at the height of the Mauryan Empire

- When Asoka embraced Buddhism, he renounced expansion of the empire and aggression, the use of force, intensive policing, and ruthless measures for tax collection.

-Because of Asoka, Buddhism became the most popular religion, but he did not make it the state religion. During his reign, and afterwards there was as a time of great stability, because

Buddhism teaches that one must be obedient to appropriate authority (leading to more government control)

one must follow the fundamental teachings, one of which is the Sangha *(or community),* which promoted co-operation, leading to increased social activity, and therefore exploration and trade.

Buddhism promotes many efforts to preserve Buddhism. Asoka commissioned the construction of Buddhist schools, monasteries and publication of Buddhist literature. He built as many as 84,000 stupas, or houses for sacred Buddhist items. He built highways across the empire to connect many of the major holy sites.

-this was also an important time for art, the stupas were the precursors to much of ancient Indian sculpture and the better access to religious education allowed for some philosophy to take place as well painting and writing

-Asoka sent many Buddhist missions to West Asia, Greece and South East Asia.

**Brahmanism**

-Asoka allowed for religious freedom and tolerance for other faiths (a teaching of Buddhism). He kept the Brahmana priests and ministers that he employed.

-Brahmanism is a religion who’s most sacred texts are the four Vedas. It is a VERY fundamentalist strain of Hinduism. The Four Vedas taught that everyone had a place in society and specific roles. Brahmanism based the expectations of a person on the specific, literal instructions in the Four Vedas, not the caste system. This lead to a stable and productive society that was harmonious with Buddhist society.

-Brahmanism discouraged the caste system and taught that no living thing should be hurt, like both Buddhism and Jainism. Because of this belief, there was improved law enforcement during this time and crime was greatly reduced

**Religion- General**

-the three religions share their fundamental principles with Hinduism. These include the idea of Nirvana as the aim of a person’s lives on earth and some seeming extreme rules that govern everyday life

-the idea of nirvana gives people something to strive for and reason to follow the rules of their religion. Rules that are common to all three beliefs are: compliance with authority, the path non-violence and the idea that everyone has a specific place in society. All of these principles allowed for structured, effective government.

the three religions is that they all support enlightenment. For this reason there were many schools built during the Mauryan Empire, again contributing to the advances and stability of the time.

**Economics**

- Chandragupta Maurya established a single currency and system of weights across India; this allowed for enhanced trade and commerce as well as increased agricultural productivity.

-With a single government, rather than the previous system of hundred of small kingdoms, the commoners no longer had to pay unfair taxes. The nationally administrated tax-system was a graduated tax system (the result of the fact that the religions of the time had different expectations of different individuals in society). The peasants paid 1/4th of the produce as tax. However, in certain cases, they paid 1/6 or even 1/8 of the produce.

- Around 80% of the population were farmers.

-Asoka sponsored the construction of thousands of road*,* waterways, canals and hospitals to promote trade.

-Although the government sponsored trade and enabled it by building infrastructure and by sending diplomats to foreign regions to propose trade, the vast, vast majority of commerce was in the hands of private companies.

-The Mauryan Empire traded with Greece, Greek states in Western Asia and what is now Malaysia

- Because they owned the Khyber Pass, the main trading pass between Central and Southern Asia, they had great influence on the trade *(meaning they taxed it).* Another advantage of being on a trade route is that the empire exchanged scientific knowledge and technology with Europe and Western Asia.

-India's exports included silk goods and textiles and spices.

-Agriculture was the basis of the economy

-mined gold, agate, quartz

**Social Structure**

-The extended family (who usually lived together) was the smallest unit in the eyes of society. The fact that a shameful act by a family member was a reflection on the whole family also contributed to the stability of the time.

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-The Mauryan Empire was the high-point for women in ancient India, although they were still discriminated against. Patriarchal ideas from Hinduism, such as Sati and women being the property of the fathers, husbands and sons were no longer practiced, for the most part. Widows were supported by the government, to some extent. A married woman had her own properly in the form of bride gift and jewels. Women in the aristocracy were expected to only deal with domestic matters. But, it was acceptable for common women to work outside of the house. Most occupations, including some low-level government positions were available to women. However, female adulters were punished more harshly then men.

- Forced labour and bonded labour (working for someone rather than paying them) did exist on a limited scale but slaves were not treated as harshly as the slaves in the western world.

-There was *some* distinction based on caste, but Jainism and Buddhism put VERY little emphasis on one’s caste; because their place in society was already clearly-defined apart from the caste classification. Brahmanism discouraged castes altogether.